

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Ohio State House

AND/OR COMMON Ohio State Capitol

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Southeast corner of Broad & High Streets

CITY, TOWN Columbus VICINITY OF 15th

STATE Ohio CODE 43215 COUNTY Franklin CODE 049

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of Ohio Honorable James Rhodes, Governor

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Columbus VICINITY OF STATE Ohio 43215

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Franklin Street Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER South High Street

CITY, TOWN Columbus STATE Ohio

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE State Survey, Ohio Historical Society

DATE February 1967  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Ohio Historical Society, 1982 Velma Avenue

CITY, TOWN Columbus STATE Ohio

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The original planners of the Ohio Capitol placed it in the center of a large square plot in central Columbus bounded by High, Broad, Third and State Streets. The large foundations measure 304 feet in length and 184 feet in width, and the entire structure cost \$1,359,121.45 when complete.

A geologist, Mona Mayer, discusses the construction of the vast building: "Limestone was hauled from the pre-Civil War Medary and state quarries a few miles west of Columbus, over a railroad especially built for that purpose.

"To a large extent, the steps were derived from a layer of rock known by quarrymen as the 'sheepskin' course. The columns were constructed from large blocks of limestone obtained from the state quarries, from the lowest course that lies below the level of low water in the Scioto River. This layer was reached only when the quarries were being worked for the construction of the State House. It is a massive bed 5-1/2 feet thick, making possible the raising of the large blocks necessary for the columns.

"The limestone blocks used in the construction of the State House were derived from a time-rock unit known as the Columbus limestone. While all layers of this stone seem to contain abundant fossils, many are literally crowded with beautifully preserved forms of life that existed in the seas that covered Ohio 300 million years ago."<sup>1</sup>

The building resting on the enormous foundation stones is described in *Temples of Democracy*; "The completed Ohio Capitol was essentially what had been adopted from Thomas Cole's completion twenty-two years earlier.

"There are four loggias of Doric columns 'in antis,' wide ones in each of the powerful ante that completely surround the building. Between the antae the rectangular windows are set in sunken two-story panels, a favorite A. J. Davis motif. The play of rectangles becomes the dominant feature of the design, its geometric severity modified by the continuous Doric entablature with its triglyphs and metopes.

"The Columbus building is seldom the object of criticism except for its radical roof treatment. Over the loggias on the front and rear are small, pedimented attics, in the Bulfinch manner, set back from the plane of the colonnades. Looming above those attics is a heavy cylinder ringed with antae, a vertical element at odds with the horizontal proportions of the building below. Two bands of windows encircle the lantern; a small cylinder supporting the nearly flat roof is barely visible. The three original winners in the Ohio competition had proposed domes, but the completed building has none."<sup>2</sup> After the Civil War the vogue for domes returned.

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1. Mayer, Mona. *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History*, p. 21
  2. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy*. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976, pp. 119-120

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1839-1861 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Henry Walters, Alexander J. Davis, William Russell West, Nathan Kelly and Isiaiah Rogers

The Ohio Capitol is considered to be one of the outstanding statements of the Greek Revival style in America. Most American Capitol buildings tried to resolve the established symbols of democracy--a greek portico, balanced plan for the legislative bodies, and the monumental rotunda capped by a dome. Talbot Hamlin equated Ohio's building--"...the Ohio state capitol takes rank with the works of Mills or of Strickland, or with Rogers's (Isaiah) own Merchants' Exchange in New York, as representing the very best ideals of the Greek Revival movement expressed in public buildings. Its great scale, its superb and daring simplicity, and its originality make it one of the most distinguished monuments of native American architecture."<sup>1</sup>

Often equated with William Strickland's Tennessee Capitol, the history of Columbus' structure is detailed in Temples of Democracy:

"Even as the building of temple capitols waned, the vaulting Jacksonian dream would find its expression in Ohio and Tennessee in two monuments grander and more subtly artistic than any earlier ones, yet totally different from one another. By the 1830's architects had become more numerous, and major designs were sought through formal competitions. The laymen who set up these early competitions seldom believed such contests needed rules any more stringent than those for horse races. They contented themselves with the pious hope that the best design would win. The inherent evils of such innocence would not reach their climax until some years later. But the exacerbation of competition in capitol building had already been seen in the coniving of Strickland and Mills at Harrisburg. A more sensational competition for a state capitol design was staged by the Capitol Commission at Columbus, Ohio.

"On January 26, 1838, when the new Ohio statehouse bill passed, the town of Columbus suddenly realized that its fears about losing the capital were over. Shops closed and there was drinking and dancing in the streets until late at night. The National Hotel spelled out NEW STATE HOUSE with candles over its door.

"The statehouse bill specified that competition must be advertised in the principal newspapers of Ohio, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington. (Boston, it is worth noting, was omitted.) There were to be three cash prizes, the highest \$500. Early the following spring a three-man commission was appointed. The advertisements appeared, and at Columbus a broadside was printed outlining the special requirements of the state, including the suggestion that the Greek Doric order be used. Considering

1. Hamlin, Talbot, Greek Revival Architecture in America. Dover Publications, New York, 2nd ed. 1964, p. 289.



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The entrances are marked by eight Doric columns on the east and west: four at the north and south.

The interior is reached by a flight of twelve steps leading into a central rotunda--"from there dramatic barrel-vaulted halls stretch with much of the lofty grandeur of a medieval cathedral. This central area is not really a rotunda, the round shape begins far above the floor to follow the outline of the vertical elements of the roof. One notices the cylindrical climax of this space only on second look, for the grand transverse axis first commands attention. The transverse halls in Ohio are plugged with long and narrow divided staircases of iron and marble. Contrasting darkness and light results from small skylights and the indirect glow from utilitarian light-courts."1

The interior finish is enriched by the addition of iron decoration, stucco ornament and a spectacular Seal of the State of Ohio in art glass set in the great dome. The Capitol also houses a fine collection of American sculpture and painting. The Governor's office and other state officials are housed just off the foyers while monumental stairways lead to the Senate and House of Representatives, all recently beautifully refurbished.

In 1901 an annex was completed and in 1965 an underground garage was opened for parking.

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1. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and William Seale, Temples of Democracy. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976, p. 117.

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that the Panic of 1837 had not subsided, the number of entries in the competition--over sixty (including one Gothic proposal)--was hardly surprising to the commissioners. As businessmen, they must have realized that the flood of entries was an indication of hard times in other parts of the United States, caused by Jackson's fiscal policies.

"At an October meeting that year, the Capitol Commission awarded three prizes: the first to Henry Walter, a house architect from Cincinnati, the second to Martin E. Thompson, sometime associate of Town & Davis in New York, and the third to the leading painter of Romantic landscapes, Thomas Cole, a resident of Catskill, New York. In December, however, the commission reported to the legislature that any one of the three projects would be suitable for the Ohio Statehouse.

"The winning designs were somewhat similar, each with balanced wings and legislative chambers, external porticoes, and large domes. Two of them used the Doric order as suggested, and the other the Ionic. Exactly why the commissioners became uncertain of their decision is not clear, but there are provocative possibilities. The third-place winner, Thomas Cole, was a friend of William A. Adams, a member of the Capitol Commission. Adams had once loaned money to the young Cole during his brief and impoverished career in Ohio as an itinerant painter. Cole in his later success never forgot the man who had shown such faith in him, and Adams was always proud of their relationship. On the commissioner's parlor wall hung a Cole painting of Tivoli. In his letters to Adams, Cole was clearly irritated that he placed only third in the capitol competition. His nephew, William Henry Bayless, a former draftsman for Ithiel Town, had given him professional help in making the plan. 'I think in justice,' wrote Cole, 'I ought to have a first premium.'

"In spite of the indecision about which design to follow, the commissioners built a wooden wall around the site, right on the National Road that ran through Columbus, and began construction of a great rectangle that could serve as the foundation for any of the three. Convicts did the work under heavy guard. From a spring on the outskirts of town, water was conveyed by wooden pipes into the compound. Several days a week the commissioners scrutinized all three sets of plans and elevations. Meanwhile, a lively correspondence continued between Adams and Cole. The commissioner sketched animals and faces in the margins of his letters for Cole's criticism. Sharing a special affection for Grecian architecture, they deplored the public's ignorance of it, though Adams confessed that he had not always been so knowledgeable himself: 'When I was first convinced that the Greeks painted their temples with various colours it made me melancholy for a month, those divine forms on the metopes of the Parthenon painted blue, and red, and green, and gilt like Dutch toys, this was too horrid.'

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"Legislators began to complain about the slow pace of the work. 'This delay,' wrote the commissioners, 'was occasioned by numerous unforeseen minor arrangements... the adjustment of the several details and modifications of the plan.' When construction had proceeded as far as it could without a definite plan, two of the commissioners went to Philadelphia to consult with William Strickland, who, though now hard up, was still known as the leading exponent of Greek Revival; they also met with his former student, Thomas U. Walter, who would one day make his own mark in the history of capitols. Still apparently unsatisfied, they made a number of calls in New York, including one to Ithiel Town's office. Town and Davis characteristically began to pursue the job.

"Cole had admonished Adams not to take the three designs to Davis: 'you will find that the premium plans will be treated with contempt as childish & impracticable works--he will talk about violation of first principles in erudite phraseology And will offer you some fresh drawings one of whose excellence will certainly be beautiful execution.' The two commissioners permitted Davis to do a revision that combined some features of the three premiums; for this they paid \$140. The large sepia drawings by Davis covered six sheets of blue atlas paper; back in Columbus a succession of men from stone contractors to the captains of the convict teams studied the proposals. To the last man they pronounced them too expensive. It was probably Adams who now took the lead, and Thomas Cole's design was modified locally. 'My plan,' wrote Cole, 'is the one adopted.'

"The commission finished the foundations on its own, before hiring Henry Walter as supervisor. Walter was undoubtedly given the job to compensate for the abandonment of his first-prize plan. But he proved useful only in matters of design, so a supervisor of construction was hired as well. William S. Sullivant directed the operations at his nearby limestone quarry, where teams of convicts, dressed in blue stripes, were sent to labor six days a week.

"By Christmas 1839 the commissioners could stand on the mighty foundation wall and point out the rectangular shape of the building. In their report to the legislature three days later they said:

'We have commenced a work, not for ourselves only, but for future generations; posterity will view it as the work of a former age, the enlightened views and intelligence of which will be clearly indicated in the structure--it is thus that the architectural monuments of a country cherish national pride and

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patriotic sentiments, and contribute, in a great degree, to identify the citizen with his country. A state destitute of great public works...is not likely to have its institutions cherished and sustained, and its soil defended, with that zeal and tenacity which has always distinguished those regions adorned with monuments of art and architectural magnificence, to which the citizen can, at all times refer, as lasting evidence of the glory of his ancestors.' (State House Commissioners Report, December 1839.)

"Heavy snows in Columbus halted the work until early spring. Columbians with time on their hands often passed idle afternoons in the old brick statehouse at the House of Representatives--called the Bear Garden--observing legislative activity that daily became more frenzied. The Panic had hit Ohio late; the reaction intensified the mutual hatred of the Democrats and the Whigs. On March 10, 1840, in one of those furious controversies, the Statehouse Act was repealed.

"The mighty stone foundations of the Ohio Capitol, on their deep bed of quarry chips and mortar, were now completely covered over with earth. Eight years passed; nearby residents were allowed to graze their milch cows on the Capitol mound. In 1843 a resolution to move the capital from Columbus passed the Senate, and was stopped in the House only with the greatest effort. The next year a commission was appointed to reconsider the statehouse plans, but no action was taken on its proposals for modifications.

"Columbus finally secured the capital in the winter of 1846 with the Act to Provide for the Erection of a New State House. Instead of appropriating money, the legislature turned the entire work force of the state penitentiary over to the Capitol Commission, effective whenever that penal institution had satisfied its current business obligations. There was a protest from the penitentiary officials, who rightfully asserted that theirs was the only paying institution in the whole state system. In 1845, these same prison officials, recognizing the possibilities of the quarry for profit, had bought the riverbank site from Mr. Sullivant. The first money from the sale of stone was used to make initial payments for a railroad spur. A thriving business had resulted, and the commissioners of the prison resented intruders, insisting it would be two years 'before any very efficient aid can be expected...under existing liabilities.' All the same, further burdens were placed on the penitentiary by the legislature the next year.

"Still, the weeds and saplings grew undisturbed over the statehouse square in Columbus. Henry Walter estimated that it would take one hundred men 275 days a year for ten years and \$250,000 cash to complete the building. The delays



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continued: The penitentiary had commitments; the Democrats were preoccupied with their campaign in Mexico. Not until the spring of 1848 did the commissioners, employing two new architects, William Russell West and J. O. Sawyer, make further modifications in the plan and set the convicts to digging out the buried foundations. When the volunteers came home from the war that summer, the basement walls were already begun."<sup>2</sup>

The Capitol was not occupied until 1857. "By that time the Ohio Commission had hired several more architects. William Russell West took the building the farthest, then resigned after unpleasantries in 1854. He was replaced by N. B. Kelly, who served for four years. As consultant on the interiors, one of the original competitors, Isaiah Rogers--then in practice in Cincinnati and later to be Ammi Young's successor as Federal Architect--was brought in to work full-time. All three men suffered political attacks of the kind that had driven Henry Walter away."<sup>3</sup>

Finally in 1858, Isaiah Rogers was appointed to finish the interiors, terraces and landscaping. He is responsible for the handsome tiled rotunda floors. The Capitol was finished November 15, 1861, twenty-two years after it had begun--a grand banquet was given for its dedication.

The Ohio Capitol, with Strickland's Nashville building are the finest expressions of the Age of Jackson and are at the same time unique in the history of American architecture.

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2. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and William Seale, Temples of Democracy. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976, pp. 110-113.
  3. Ibid., pp. 115-116.

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- Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. Oxford University Press, 1944. (Reprinted by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1969.) pp. 54,157,286-8,347.
- Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and William Seale, Temples of Democracy. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976. pp. 115-117, 119-120.
- O'Donnell, Thomas E. The Greek Revival Capitol at Columbus, Ohio. The Architectural Forum, Vol. XLII, No. 1. June, 1925. pp. 5-8.
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